

Baseball Season Gearing up for Second Half

By Duane Plank

Did you get a chance to watch MLB All-Star festivities earlier this week from the City of Budweiser, St. Louis, Mo.? The midway point in the marathon season is a good time to take a look at some of the hits and misses thus far, and look towards the playoffs in October.

The Dodgers withstood the 50-game absence of drug-cheater Manny Ramirez, inserted singles-hitter Juan Pierre into the outfield line-up, and barely missed a beat. Man-Ram went into hiding for a couple of months, escaping the wrath of the misty-eyed Dodger fans. Oh, that’s right, most if not all of the Dodger fans weren’t holding Ramirez accountable for his actions, were they?

Some obsessed zealots supporting the Blue Crew actually traveled down the hellacious 5 freeway to San Diego to welcome back the dreadlocked basher when he returned a couple of weeks ago, conveniently opening up against the minor league Padres.

But Manny or no Manny, the Dodgers are clearly the class of the NL West. Which was considered a weak division by most of the prognosticators back in early April. But the San Francisco Giants, currently sitting in the wild card slot seven games behind the locals have turned out to be the surprise team in the National League, if not in all of baseball. They pitch, they pitch, and then they pitch some more.

And the pitching begins with 2008 Cy Young award winner Tim Lincecum, (10-2, 2.33 ERA) who continues to befuddle major league hitters with his assortment of pitches. How does a guy who tips the scales at around a buck-seventy, and stands 5-foot-11, deliver a 98-mph fastball to the plate? And then follow it up with a ball-breaking curve ball and

drop-dead change-up? Must be his mechanics, but if that is true, wouldn’t dozens of other young pitchers have copied the seemingly offbeat wind-up and had similar success?

Suffice to say that the Lincecum legend should continue to grow in the second half of the season. And when you add fellow NL All-Star Matt Cain (10-2, 2.38) and graybeard Randy Johnson, who won a bunch of Cy Young trophies in his heyday to the starting staff, the hated ones can roll out a pretty potent group of hurlers. And don’t forget about left-hander Barry the Zero Zito (5-9, 5.01), although I am sure most Giants fans would like to have a case of amnesia when it comes to the overpriced (\$18 million per season) lefty.

And just for good measure, Giant spot-starter Jonathan Sanchez tossed a no-hitter last week against the minor-league San Diego Pads.

The Colorado Rockies, who jettisoned Manager Clint Hurdle a while back when they were struggling mightily, have become relevant again under the tutelage of ex-Dodger manager Jim Tracy, who was last scene being canned by the always-pathetic Pittsburgh Pirates. Always-pathetic unless you are old enough to remember the Pittsburgh Lumber Company and slugger Willie Stargell.

Anyway, the Rocks are back in the race, at least back in the wild card chase. Their recent reawakening is being spearheaded by a couple of unlikely All-Star selections. Right-hander Jason Marquis (11-6, 3.65), who recently pitched a masterful game against the Dodgers, and right-fielder Brad Hawpe (.318, 13 HR, 57 RBIs), will be counted on by Tracy to continue their career years. And the Rockies hierarchy will count on Tracy

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Frankly Plank

By Duane Plank

Catching up on a few of the tidbits that have surfaced in the past week or so while I have been helping coach the Gundo Little League All-Star team. We took the first step on the road to Williamsport by capturing the District 36 championship last weekend. The kids trounced the boys from Palos Verdes 14-3 in the finale to cruise through the tourney 4-0. Next stop is the Sectionals, starting this weekend in Lomita.

Tidbit numero uno: Was taking my nephew Cameron out to get him his much-delayed birthday gift, which turned out to be a defective razor scooter, when nephew Nolan made the off-handed comment that a lot of 50-year-old people were dying. Nice! This was just after the pitch guy Billy Mays passed on the heels of the demise of Michael Jackson. Both were the big 50. Which I turned about three months ago, for those who pay attention. And if you don’t pay attention each week, thanks for looking at this little ditty *this* week.

I know it may not be funny to some, but when I heard of the death of the TV salesman, I initially thought that *Willie* Mays, the baseball icon, the “Say Hey Kid,” had bought the farm. Guess I should pay better attention.

Reminds me of the time a few years back (2003) when I heard the distressing news that “Palmer” had died. I was in a tizzy until I found out it wasn’t golfer Arnold Palmer who had matriculated to the big putting green in the sky--it was musician *Robert* Palmer who entered the pearly gates. Palmer, who crooned *Addicted to Love*, among his other hits, was 54 when he succumbed to a heart attack. And guess what? There was a scramble amongst the family money-grubbers post death, over the singer’s estate of 30-million pounds. Which is how much in pesos, folks? I know someone out there in the vast *FP* audience can help me with that one.

Speaking of birthdays, congrats to *Dodger Girl* and hubby on the second birthday of their second-born bambina. The raucous festivities took place a couple of days ago, I believe.

All of the salacious rumors that you heard about actor Joyce DeWitt and her Mayberry arrest for DUI on July Fourth must be taken with the proverbial grain of salt. The nearly 60-year-old DeWitt was sent to the hoosegow in the late afternoon on the Fourth, presumably missing the fantastic local fireworks extravaganza at good-old Rec Park. No info on whether Ms. DeWitt made her one allowed call from the friendly confines to has-been actress Suzanne Sommers.

Already writing three columns for this fine publication, and the death of and Staples Center ceremony for the King of Pop really don’t fit into any of the columns. So I had to round-file the reams of sarcastic comments that I had concerning Mr. Jackson. Have considered submitting a fourth column--one that would focus on celebrity gossip as well as the late-night escapades of the local citizenry. Am sure that the column would make for some interesting reading, but, as my wife reminds me, “We live in this town.”

So I’ll just concentrate on what I allegedly do best, and leave most of the celebrity stuff

to *TMZ*, and the reporting on the nocturnal adventures of the locals to...hopefully nobody. Wouldn’t want to alienate my sources, or burn any bridges, would I?

Gotta pass on this one Jackson joke, though. Which isn’t mean at all to the K.O.P., who for some reason, began wearing a single white glove during his appearances many full moons ago.

Any of you baseball guys remember Dodger shortstop Jose Offerman, who played with the Blue Crew from 1990-95? Known more for his batting prowess than defensive ability, Offerman was dealt to the Kansas City Royals in 1996 and finished his MLB career with the New York Mets in ‘05. Career batting average of .273.

Anyway, the joke going around during Offerman’s stay in L.A. was thus: “What do Jose Offerman and Michael Jackson have in common?” Punch line: “They both wear a glove for no apparent reason!”

Get it? See, Offerman struggled mightily on defense, and Jackson...oh, forget it. I am not too swift with the jokes, anyway. Lean more towards the acerbic, smart-ass one-liners and cheap comebacks.

Onward to the morose story of ex-NFL quarterback Steve McNair, who was shot to death by his 20-year-old girlfriend, who then turned the gun on herself. Sad story. By the way, McNair was not 50-years-old when he caught the four bullets. Air McNair was only 36. Listening to the early reports of the shooting, one piece of info that the reporter neglected to mention was that Mr. McNair was married and had four children.

And now it appears that McNair’s young girlfriend, one Sahel Kazemi, may have been distraught because the retired QB was cheating on her! Oh, the humanity.

Earth to any and all who may be involved in extramarital dalliances: If the dude or dudette is cheating on his spouse with you, there is a real possibility that he or she may be double-dipping. I’m just saying.

This is all hearsay, of course, but I *did* have a grandfather who, allegedly, catted-around on the side. Guy actually had two separate families, I’m told. And who knows how many other special “friends” gramps had?

And Laker fans, at least most of you, you can rest easy. Cuz new acquisition Ron Artest is *not* a homosexual. Not that there is anything wrong with that, by the way. Artest was speaking to reporters last week after signing his free agent deal with the Lakes. He was talking about following Kobe Bryant into the shower after the final game of the 2008 playoffs, the game the Lakers lost to the Celts by about 100 points or so.

Said the always-entertaining Artest, “Yeah, I walked in the shower. I’m not a homosexual or nothing like that, but Kobe had no clothes on.” Glad that issue is cleared up. But I wonder why a non-Laker player was wandering around the Laker locker room with access to the showers?


For what it’s worth, the Lakers upgraded their championship roster by inking the mercurial Artest and letting hard-working Trevor Ariza sign with the depleted Houston Rockets.

from front page


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